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I am a Theorist: Learning to Name My World with a New Literary Humanism

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Abstract

In this paper I ask: how can I improve what I am doing as a literary theorist working with a 'new literary humanism' and seeking to make explicit the educational contexts in which much reading and studying of literature takes place? As part of this developmental, self-reflective process, this paper seeks to make explicit one of my core living values: the freedom to name myself and my world and to be transformed by this process. I show how I have moved from a less helpful way of naming my identity as a theorist, to a more positive and personal pathway. I show this by openly coming to terms with my experiences as an international adoptee straddling multiple cultures and languages, struggling to form a coherent sense of self that avoids splitting my identity into fragments.

Given that my primary avenue for educational influence is as an author-learner communicating to other author-learners (students and academics), I then interrogate two conceptions of personhood inhering in the identity of author: a deconstructionist model and an Orthodox Christian one. I argue that for me, being explicit about my ontological foundations as an author hoping to influence others by way of my core living value, strengthens the credibility of my personalism as an author. In seeking to image forth the life-enhancing ability to name myself and my world, to seek a holistic self-identity rather than a fragmented one, I do so because I hold to the life-affirming path of humanity articulated in Orthodox conceptions of the Incarnation.

Keywords: educational influence; author-learner; new literary humanism; naming; transformation; adoption.

*Be what you are. Give
what is yours to give.
Have style. Dare.*

– Stanley Kunitz (1997, p. 18)¹

Introduction

I am a Literary Theorist, working in an English department at a research-intensive British university. Literary (or critical) theorists think about approaches to reading and studying literature, and also about the qualities of literature itself. My own research brings together the work of two rather different authors from the last century who were nevertheless thinking about how experiences with literature can be part of a broader quest for wisdom. Their names are Hilda Doolittle (or H.D., as she is known professionally) and Louise Rosenblatt. I shall talk about them more in due course.

Linking thought or theory about reading and studying literature to wider educational goals and contexts is what makes my work distinctive to other literary theories, which can sometimes obscure the institutional learning contexts in which much reading and studying of literature takes place. But adding wisdom (as the wider educational goal) to the mix makes my work even more distinctive. While psychologists have been investigating wisdom for some decades now (Walsh, 2015; Hall, 2010), literary studies have tended to leave such humanistic themes behind as part of a redundant ‘literary humanism’. As I come to reflect on my work and the educational influence I hope to have, this is the activity I hope to improve: connecting literary theory to the educational contexts in which much reading and studying of literature takes place.

Broadly speaking, then, literary humanism, in all its manifestations, is interested in literature’s capacity to speak to and of human values and identity in particularly approachable ways (Mousley, 2011). And yet literary theories associated with poststructuralism and historicism – popular approaches to, and legacies surrounding, literary study – have intensely scrutinized the integrity or essentiality of human value and identity: they are ‘sites’ to be deconstructed and particularized in specific contexts. This has left ‘the human’ (frequently written in distancing quotation marks) in literary studies as a fragile entity, in need of the care and sensitive attention which it is now getting, in the guise of a ‘new literary humanism’ (Mousley, 2011, 2013).

Broadly speaking, the ‘new literary humanism’ engages a number of literary critics and theorists who, in their own ways, are re-assessing literature’s capacity to involve readers in themes associated with humanity’s core values and recurring experiences. The 2011 collection of essays, *Towards a New Literary Humanism*, indicates the nature of the debate and the various conversational threads weaving in and out (Mousley, 2011). A common

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presupposition seems to be, however, that in spite of the existence in literature of human experiences which can be said to solidify the human as somebody recognizably consistent in spite of superficial differences due to vagaries of space or time, the ground of this identity or 'essence' is essentially unstable and de-centered. This is because ultimately, such an identity lacks a source or anchor outside of itself, and so the human image can only reflect itself, in the process sliding such reflections within a hall of mirrors which endlessly defers their ground so that it becomes virtually negligible. This certainly encourages philosophical or 'critical' debate (the staging of conferences and opportunities for further publication), yet in a sense it also reveals a significant debt to the deconstructionist tendencies of poststructuralism. The 'new literary humanism' is largely a literary humanism birthed from the pangs of deconstruction. Alternatively, to put it another way, deconstruction as a literary movement stands as a B.C./A.D. divide in the discipline (Moi, 2009; Taylor, 2008; Cunningham, 2002). What comes after is irrevocably impacted by its existence. 'The human' in literary studies can never be the same again.

In my contribution to the new literary humanism, I do not share any deconstructionist commitments, and I do not wish to influence others in favor of this line of thought. Literary humanism, in both its old and new guises, tends to present literature as an ersatz religion:

.... mediating ontology where religion had previously monopolized this role. Books come to matter intensely to 'selves' (and treated as a lifelong source of guidance, inspiration or provocation) because it is through books that we attempt to work out who we are and what the significance of our life might be. (Mousley, 2011, p. 9)

Or, as Valentine Cunningham has put it, reading literature can be 'a selving, self-making process' (Cunningham, 2002, p. 148). Yet for all the new literary humanism's emphasis on the instability and fragility of 'the human', its vision is refreshingly ecumenical, welcoming contributions from different philosophical and even religious beliefs. As a practicing Christian baptized into Eastern Orthodox and then Anglican traditions, I can therefore hold to the value of reading literature as a 'selving, self-making process' without needing to deny an essential anchor which can image forth human identity across time and space.

Drawing on the work of Paulo Freire, the educational philosopher Maxine Greene (1917-2014) used to emphasize the importance of being able to name ourselves and our worlds (Greene, 2000, p. 183). In *Releasing the Imagination* (2000), she talked of individuals who had been 'challenged to "name" their lived worlds and, through the naming, to transform those worlds' (Greene, 2000, p. 24). From a sense of incompleteness, I launch off into quest. For Greene, this incompleteness is an existential one, in the sense that the human should always see herself in a state of becoming, requiring her active agency to realize her possibilities in community with others. Scholars of H.D.'s work, meanwhile, have emphasized H.D.'s quest to write her own experience and to let that writing in turn write herself (Friedman, 1990). As an author who wrote and rewrote her world by constantly renaming herself through *noms de plume*, H.D. encourages me, in the context of my work and professional environment, to appreciate the importance of language in naming my lived world and then transforming it. Indeed, she turns literary humanism's emphasis on reading writing as 'a selving, self-making process', on the image of the author – on me as a writer.

Who am I, and how do I relate to my human(istic) subject material? Do I stand from it afar, or do I allow myself to be personally transformed by my learning, especially in my use of language? And do I then influence others by letting them see how I have been and am being transformed?

As a literary theorist, on the one hand I am a reader of writing; on the other hand, I am also an author-learner who must grapple with the educational influence I am having on others according to what I choose to write about and how I write it. More than that: I must address how I am presenting the relationship between myself and my work. As a theorist working with literary humanism, am I at all in danger of negating its value as a subject worthy of study, by indirectly hollowing out its educational relevance for me as a 'selving' individual? Am I professionally engaged with a topic yet distance it from impacting how I do what I do, and how I let my professional work infiltrate the rest of my life? To ask a central question: how is my literary-theoretical work 'living' (Whitehead, 1989)?

In this paper I explore how my theoretical research in the field of literary humanism is helping me to name myself and my world and transform these in such a way that my educational influence nourishes the personhood in the learner. Thus, I wish to couch my literary-theoretical work as a living educational one, in which my influence arises principally from my responsibility and activity as a living author-learner. Concerned with how people in English studies at HE-level engage experientially with literature as the basis for a quest for wisdom, I want to be sure that I am conscious of myself and my own 'becoming', and communicate it in papers such as this one. The more I am conscious of this, the better I feel I will do what I do. When the literary theorist Jane Tompkins explored the inner processes which helped her to develop her own theory, back in the 1980s and 1990s, for some this was an unwelcome intrusion of 'I' into what should be more impersonal. But for me, it lends more credibility to her theoretical work. I see in what ways she seeks to improve the legitimacy of her theory because she has been open and reflective in exploring the challenges she has faced, especially as a woman in theory, and in an educational institution that often seemed isolating (Tompkins, 1987, 1996).

On a more personal note, this paper comes at a point in my life where I am forced to gather the fragments of my personal history – my own becoming – in order to name and transform my lived world. As an international adoptee conceived in violent circumstances in a country devastated by poverty and the successive decisions of a maniacal dictator, naming myself and my world and transforming these involves daring to speak of the values or lack of values that led to my birth as a person and my adoption into the human race. Poised between different languages, cultures, Christianities, names, nationalities, parents, siblings, personal geneses and emotional pasts, I am a poststructuralist's dream. I could, therefore, influence others by promoting (or sacrificing) myself as a 'postmodernist subject whose selves engage in the process of endless splitting', or I could seek to live my life and do my work as a self-consciously wounded (but nevertheless centered) human being, who has chosen to move into a quest for wholeness, peace-making, and reparation with others, involving literary work in this process (Friedman, 1990, p. 41). To echo Jean McNiff, my story is essential to my research story, which is in turn essential to my living-educational-theory; it *becomes* me to speak it into existence, and I hope it contributes to validating my research (McNiff, 2007).

As is customary for a conceptual exploration in literary studies, the conceptual and contextual work appears first, before an evaluation of its 'application'. I have chosen to structure this paper by first telling you about my theoretical work and what it is precisely I hope to improve and therefore influence others more profoundly. I then move to a discussion of one of my core values, which concerns the ability to name oneself and one's world and be transformed by this naming process. At this point I show a little more vulnerability as I tell you about the struggles I have had to live out this core value in my own life. The final section of the paper seeks to reflect upon my possible educational influence on others. I say 'possible' because I do not *assume*, much less expect, that I have an influence on others. I talk of 'hoping to influence'. This is an important distinction. I understand the need to ask how I can improve what I am doing in my work. But the closer this question is connected to evaluating the influence I am having on others, the closer I am to seeing others as yardsticks for assessing my own importance. Moreover, I am uneasy with equating the worth of a theory in terms of its reported influence on others. By making sure that my theoretical work is founded upon my core living values, and that I am clear about any living contradictions (Whitehead, 1989) in myself, then as I see it, I have done what I can; I can do no more. In a professional environment saturated by a discourse of 'impact' and 'measurable outcomes', talk of 'educational influence' needs to be nuanced and handled sensitively. I hope I have done so in the pages that follow.

My Theoretical Work

In the interests of cross-disciplinary conversation and vantage points, I won't dwell too deeply on the details of my theoretical work. I shall simply frame its current development (it is still work in progress) in light of its intellectual background. While my overall project is ambitious in its scope and expansive in its commitments, the project is grounded in a comparative study of two American women authors writing in different genres and different contexts. H.D. (1886-1961) is more recognizably 'literary' in that she was a poet, novelist, memoirist, and even an actress (Guest, 1985). Having begun her career as an Imagist poet in London around 1911, she changed direction after the First World War and began writing autobiographical prose and more lyrical poetry. In the 1930s she experimented with film and undertook psychoanalysis with Sigmund Freud in Vienna. In the Second World War she poured herself into occult and spiritualist work under the shadow of Hugh Dowding – the man famed for winning the Battle of Britain in 1940. In the 1950s she composed her epic poem, *Helen in Egypt* (1961), which recasts the author's experiences in the Classical form of epic poetry. Academics look at H.D. for a number of reasons, and the days when H.D. was pigeon-holed as an Imagist poet, a proto-feminist, and someone who worked with Freud, are over.

These are still important aspects of her work, but today scholars are as interested in her occult work as they are in her sexuality and gender subversion (Anderson, 2013; Hogue & Vandivere, 2009). They are interested in what she does with language (Morris, 2003). And I am interested in her potential to speak to education, as somebody who self-consciously positioned herself in quest, wherein words became 'anagrams, cryptograms, / little boxes, conditioned // to hatch butterflies' (H.D., 1983, p. 540). Starting from the premise that 'we

are each, householder, / each with a treasure' H.D. was committed to 're-valu[ing] / our secret hoard', which I interpret to mean the sum of our past experiences that make up who we are (H.D., 1983, p. 538). Turning to material from the past, as students and academics frequently do in English studies, H.D. understands that each mind 'has its peculiar ego-centric / personal approach / to the eternal realities, // and differs from every other / in minute particulars' (H.D., 1983, pp. 540-1). As a literary theorist working with approaches to reading and responding to literature, H.D.'s work offers me a way of conceptualizing a commitment to permitting individual learners to map out their own landscape of inquiry, based on their potential to refract 'the eternal realities' through their own experience, with life and with the arts. This differs from the more prevalent practice of telling students (and other academics) in which contexts to embed their reading, based on some broad picture of external, 'out-there' connections or networks among texts and writers (Barry, 2007).

In order to theorize my core commitment further, I bring H.D.'s work into dialogue with the work of the educational and literary theorist, Louise M. Rosenblatt (1904-2005). Rosenblatt is famous for her seminal work, *Literature as Exploration*, which she first published in 1938 under the Progressive Education Association's Commission on Human Relations. Once the copyright was returned to her, she revised this work and published it a further four times, with the fifth edition appearing in 1995. Before she died in 2005, Rosenblatt compiled a collection of essays spanning the 1930s-1990s and this book, *Making Meaning with Texts*, appeared only days before her death.

Rosenblatt interests me because she re-frames traditional literary theory from the perspective of the reader-learner (Rosenblatt, 2001). Indeed, she refused, and I refuse as well, to separate ideas about literature and reading and writing about literature, from the educational contexts in which these activities often occur (Pradl, 1996). She was unerringly committed to cultivating democratic attitudes in young people, and she framed literary study as a principal means of doing this within the broader American educational infrastructure (Rosenblatt, 1995).

A daughter of immigrants from the Russian empire, Rosenblatt was brought up on a diet of libertarian thinkers and French and Russian anarchists, such as Emma Goldman, who stayed with the Rosenblatts in New Jersey around 1909 (Rosenblatt, 1982). When she came to compose her own curricula at New York University in the 1940s through the early 1970s, she returned to the important relationship between literature and human values. For instance, one course, which she entitled 'Literature and the Crisis in Values', embraced a range of European literature which would enable class discussions to focus on 'the conflicts in values that the reader lived through as he or she read the work' (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 242). Works were chosen which 'were obviously ones in which questions in values – what are the priorities in life? – were of extreme importance' (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 242). This is a strongly humanistic stance, and yet Rosenblatt echoes H.D. in her shared emphasis on the individual's refraction of particular values through their own experience. As Rosenblatt said:

...there was a constant concern not only for what were the values in conflict within the works, but then what were the values that the reader brought to the works – the value systems, and how did all of these mesh and how did they conflict and how were they confirmed or not – by the literary experience. (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 242)

At the core of my research work, then, lies a central belief in the capacity for meaningful experiences with artworks, and particularly literary works, to aid the individual learner in a quest for wisdom. I understand wisdom broadly as a mix of knowledge about central, recurring human experiences across time and space; insight into modes of living which can help the individual to live a more fulfilled, everyday existence; and finally, an increasing concern for thinking, feeling, and behaving in ways that enhance the wellbeing of others as well as oneself (Walsh, 2015).

This affordance I am suggesting literary study offers can only be legitimate, of course, if there is a valid basis for thinking that human experiences encountered in the arts can indeed speak to us on some level today. While H.D. believed in a fairly mystical communion among human beings distanced by time and space, Rosenblatt's literary and educational theory is firmly materialist. On this level, her humanism is vulnerable to poststructuralist erosions (which she countered during her lifetime), leveled against the integrity and ideal of the liberal, democratic individual (Rosenblatt, 1995; Flynn, 2007). If there is no center to humanity which it does not create itself, it can be deconstructed and localized in contexts that distance and even smother its multiple voices, in the process deafening contemporary ears to what humans from the past can say to us today (Cunningham, 2002). As the lines are drawn in the new literary humanism, which believes that literature concerns universal as well as particular experiences, there is a need to formulate and articulate a robust foundation on which the universal integrity of the human rests (Mousley, 2013).

As I see it, I find it hard to leave the defense of human integrity at the feet of the localized human herself. I am left in a hall of mirrors if all I can use to justify my importance is the scraps of delicately articulated, particularized human 'characteristics' cast under my intellectual table. I search for something deeper, something which I can point to outside of myself that enables me to define, preserve, and fight for the integrity of myself and others – past, present, and future. Rhetorically speaking, how can I influence others in favor of a new literary humanism if my human foundations are built on sand, vulnerable to the kind of erosion brought by the spray of poststructuralist and contextualist philosophies? This is not to say that new literary humanisms are naïve: they are robustly critical (Halliwell & Mousley, 2003); and I do not want to erect a straw target for my own purposes. But there comes a point, I think, when incisive critique and intricate taxonomies must give way to something more passionately immediate and adaptable: a vision that does not always require a traveling company of supporting criticisms attached to concept-fencing, after the analytic tradition.

I want to work toward this issue of self-reflexivity in the new literary humanism by first turning to the effect my theoretical work is having on how I frame the relationship between myself and my work. Defending particular values in my work can sometimes encourage me to think, as Rosenblatt sometimes did of her own work, of my activity as a form of activism into which I pour my self-worth. On a deeper level, however, I am finding spaces to name myself and my lived world, to pay attention to how I am 'becoming' and transforming my world. It is from this deeper transformation that I hope to influence others educationally.

Naming My World with a New Literary Humanism

Writing literary theory, which is what the new literary humanism is – a theory of literature and criticism - seems to provoke identity politics in a way that other kinds of literary scholarship do not. Perhaps this is because literary theory sometimes involves a mode of philosophy, and philosophers work with ideas. In a sense, the work that philosophers do can be said to be directly creative: their contributions are conceptual, sometimes developing mental frameworks which others can then use to see the world (or a particular part of it) in a different way. To put it another way: in the same way that painters, photographers, and creative writers create from the exercise of internal structures of thought and feeling, literary theorists who do philosophy turn around existing ideas and approaches in order to offer something original.

If this is not obvious, I only have to look at the celebrity culture that has developed in my discipline, which seems to esteem academics who demonstrate their creative thinking in works reputed to be of theoretical or philosophical brilliance: Julia Kristeva, Judith Butler, Toril Moi, and Derrida (among others). Rarely do academics who specialize in historical modes of literary scholarship receive the same accolade (Susan Stanford Friedman being an exception that comes to mind). It is probable that the roots of this discrepancy go deep into the history and structure of the institutional discipline, which has divided and celebrated 'generalists' from 'scholars' since time immemorial (Graff, 1987). Perhaps the attraction of some literary theorists is that we think they exercise more freedom in the work they do; they can speak on expansive topics, write journalistic pieces, and perhaps even reach to that lofty position of public intellectual: relevant, intelligent, and worth listening to (or at least interviewing).

On one level, I find that my theoretical work encourages me to create myself in the image of these intellectual celebrities. Admittedly, this is an unattractive quality, but something that appears less obnoxious and more complicated the further into its dynamics we go. Generally speaking, I have tended to esteem intellectuals and artists who have been utterly committed to work which aims to make the world a better or more beautiful place, such as Rosenblatt. I am especially attracted to those individuals who were also dynamic personalities: captivating, alluring, complicated. It is the difference, perhaps, between *Middlemarch's* Edward Casaubon and Will Ladislav. Casaubon is dedicated to his work, as Dorothea appreciates and likes, but ultimately he is closed off from the world around him and does not seek to make the world a better place. Will, on the other hand – alluring, handsome, energetic – is everything that Casaubon is not. His talents are somewhat hidden, but as the novel progresses the reader sees with Dorothea how much potential lies within him, and Dorothea's choice to marry Will indicates George Eliot's ethical preference for the individual who uses his or her creativity, energy, and intelligence to make the lives of others happier and more fulfilled. Dorothea's psychic myopia lifts when she transfers her attentions from Casaubon to Will, and thus is baptized into wisdom (Wiesenfarth, 1982).

But what happens when this well-placed commitment to working in creative ways for the benefit of others, and admiring those who also work in this way, becomes a mode of escape from having to relate to other people in a familiar, less expansive, and more prosaic way? As I have progressed with my work, and as I read more about Rosenblatt and the values she held to so dearly and which drove her activism, I find myself believing that I *am*

what I do: that my self-worth is bound up with my self-imposed mission. This permits me to excuse human niceties (phoning my father in the evening, meeting a friend for a drink, going to church) in favor of something I consider more fundamentally important (and self-inflating). When I am in danger of falling into this mind-frame, I am in danger of naming my lived world in such a way that its individualism suffocates the development of healthy interpersonal development.

To elaborate: to name my lived world in this way is to be guilty of the behavior that the literary hostess Ottoline Morrell (1873-1938) saw countless times in artists and thinkers who stayed with her. Ottoline began entertaining politicians in London in 1907 who were connected to her husband's work as Liberal MP for South Oxfordshire. After 1910 or so, she began to give hospitality to modern artists such as Mark Gertler, Katherine Mansfield, Virginia Woolf, Vanessa Bell, and D. H. Lawrence (Seymour, 2008). Unlike her modernist artistic friends, however, Ottoline was not somebody who had a specific, recognizably artistic domain in which to shape and develop her creativity and her intellect, and this caused her a lot of pain (Morrell, 1917). Instead, as David Cecil has said, she became 'a creative artist of the private life, whose imagination expressed itself in the clothes she wore, the rooms she sat in, the social life that took place there, and, more than anything, in herself' (Cecil, 1976, p. 10). Ranged against her intellectual and artistic friends, she was an anomaly.

In seeking to bridge the creative life with matters of personality and development, Ottoline came to be extremely perceptive of discordances in others regarding the balance of these two concerns. From the 1910s onwards she began to see that some of her modernist friends developed their identities as artists and named their artistic worlds at the expense of cultivating their humanity. Writing in her journal in February 1918, she decided:

[John Middleton] Murry, Katherine [Mansfield], [Mark] Gertler, and all these modern artists don't know what it means to have a love for humanity. They can understand a personal selfish love, but that is only an extension of themselves. The sort of love I value is one that understands ordinary human beings. I suppose many artists are wanting in vitality and they fear this larger love. They say it 'ruins their flame'. But how selfish they are, and by being so their flame flickers and dwindles [...] What most people really want is not to have contact with other human beings, but to scratch away at their little 'works of art' and to be admired and praised. (Morrell, 1974, p. 234)

I quote this at length because it reveals the quality of thought Ottoline arrived at through her contact with artists innovating or 'scratching away' at their work. Ottoline's early commitment to a fairly pietistic form of Christianity transmuted in her later life into a desire to infuse the pursuits of the mind and the creative being with a sense of the importance of human beings: of developing capacities to love other people (Whitney, 2012). The problem with Mansfield, Murry, and Gertler (among others) was that in Ottoline's eyes they fragmented their humanity and in doing so exhibited a degree of snobbery and elitism she found unattractive.

In recent months and perhaps years, I have tended to think that naming my world and 'selving' myself involves equating my self-worth with the success of my creative-intellectual work. The difference between Ottoline and her modernist friends, and the difference between Will Ladislav and Edward Casaubon is the way in which one's efforts are

integrated into personal development. On the one hand, I might choose to image forth competition, anxiety, and exclusion as my operative values. On the other hand, I can choose to see my work and explain it to others as part of my living: work comes to serve a purpose greater than itself. The Romantic conception of the artist has tended to confuse the two positions, and the first is excused as something eccentric rather than destructive. To truly learn to name my world, I need to become conscious of what, in my experience, my world has been, is, and might be. Ottoline criticized her friends because they seemed somewhat unconscious of a dimension of lived existence, and thus when they named their worlds as artists committed to art, the naming was reductive and destructive; they were missing out a piece of the jigsaw.

When I look around me in my university and in the academic culture at large, I become conscious of Parker Palmer's hidden curriculum (Palmer, 1993). How are academics, as authors and teachers, influencing me – educating me – to believe that my self-worth derives from the success of my intellectual work? What do I see in this undercurrent? Working with a new literary humanism means that I am especially sensitive to this discrepancy. Unless I find a new way to name my world as a theorist and as an author-learner, I am in danger of hollowing out the potential educational influence I could effect in writing about humanistic themes. How can I improve what I am doing? Am I actively entering into human transformation by recognizing and acting on my own quest for wisdom – for wholeness? In the questions I am asking in my research, am I reckoning with the 'quest' in 'question' (Lifton, 1994, p. 273)?

Transformation is a hugely complicated phenomenon, of course. But my Christian influences have helped me to see that at some level, it isn't, and must not be over-complicated if it is to be an operative, living concept. In Parker Palmer's epistemology, the knower has to enter into *troth* with the known (Palmer, 1993). This is a word rarely used today, but it intimates at a kind of relationship or transaction, in which the knower opens herself to being transformed by what is known. Personal knowing has always been at the heart of many kinds of Christianity as well as other belief systems, but Palmer helps me to see how it has wider educative relevance as well. Entering into *troth* with my subject material in the context of a new literary humanism means humbling myself to listening to how the lives and experiences of others I read about can enlighten my own, so that I can become a better theorist, a more living author-learner.

At this stage in the paper, I wish to relate a personal case study of naming my world by entering into *troth* with my subject material. Maxine Greene implied that naming the self and naming the world of the self are related but distinct things. In my reading on adoption psychology and from my own experience, I see that the two are intimately entwined, but the former can become a symbolic act which in turn writes the self that issues forth from repeated pronunciations of that name. My reading into H.D.'s life confirms this.

In her book, *Penelope's Web* (1990), Susan Stanford Friedman drew attention to H.D.'s noms de plume. According to Friedman, H.D. assigned herself different names for different literary endeavors:

Never a unitary gesture, this (re)naming was an endlessly repeating act that signified the self as a process (not a product) of becoming. For H.D., words, most especially names, were

potent forces that not only signified, but also called into being what they named. (Friedman, 1990, pp. 35-6)

As an author, H.D. maintained a public presence that would influence others; a name could 'materialize' this authorial self (Friedman, 1990, p. 36). In this view, names are not summative entities; instead they issue forth and accumulate associations. They are 'spaces to inhabit' (Friedman, 1990, p. 39). As a linguistic event, a personal name calls the named and other namers of that person into an ongoing epistemological transaction. 'For H.D.', says Friedman, 'names were texts that could be read for the selves they constructed, for the "spell" they cast in an endless process of self-conscious self-making' (Friedman, 1990, p. 41).

As an individual learning to inhabit the spaces of my lived world, some of which I have suppressed and blocked out, I find that I transact with H.D.'s work and experience it in a way that urges me to open myself up to potential transformation. I am reminded of Stanley Kunitz's words, quoted in the epigraph to this paper: 'Be what you are. Give / what is yours to give' (Kunitz, 1997, p. 18). But who am I? And what do I have to give?

H.D. was her own person: an artist with her own distinctive experiences she gave to others in the form of her art. Her creativity with names and the work these did in materializing her lived world help me to place my own experience as an international adoptee in perspective. I am jolted out of unconsciousness by the force of my names and the human desires, losses, and commitments – Rosenblatt's meshing of value systems – signified in the wordplay.

In her exploration of the adopted self, Betty Jean Lifton speaks of the way in which adoptees sometimes become conscious of the quest in which they have always been situated. Whereas Susan Stanford Friedman sees no problem with the splitting latent in H.D.'s re-naming of herself, for Lifton, 'the self's quest is always toward nurturance and growth and away from death-related qualities of disintegration' (Lifton, 1994, p. 130). Critics of H.D.'s work have analyzed her traumas and, while recognizing H.D.'s own quest for wholeness – for wisdom concerning experiences of war and love – have nevertheless found poststructuralist sensibilities an apt way to describe how she coped with her trauma (emigration; breakup of her marriage; childbirth in a high-risk circumstance; and frequent disappointments in love) (Kloepfer, 1989; Robinson, 1982). But as Lifton says, adult trauma differs from an adoptee's trauma in that adoptees, 'who experienced separation and loss early in life, usually at birth, [have] no previous self – no pre-traumatic self – from which to draw strength' (Lifton, 1994, p. 260). For splitting and fragmentation to be desirable, even intellectually fashionable, one surely does this from a tacit knowledge that if things become too scattered, become too unbearable, there is a core self (even if largely unknown) to return to once intellectual playtime is over. The difference, therefore, is that adoptees have to give birth to themselves in order to function as a whole, rather than split, human being; they are their own midwives (Lifton, 1994, p. 261).

Part of this may involve naming oneself in such a way that, like H.D., the name becomes a space the self can inhabit and learn from. As an international adoptee poised between different cultures, I learn about the possibilities of language for naming my lived world, and allowing others to learn from this use of language, which transcends linguistic borders. I realize that I cannot return to my pre-adopted self and live in the ghost of the boy

who was taken from the north of Romania in 1990; but nor can I return to the self that filled the void of my adoptive parents' mourning for the biological children that never were. The names that have been assigned to me over the years were 'mansions in my father's house', so to speak: spaces created and endorsed by the adoption system for multiple parents to see extensions of themselves mature and hold forth the lineage. Learning to name my world, I find that courage to name myself is the first step. Processing and researching the worlds intersecting my psyche and my body, I send forth an authorial and personal name that not only influences and impacts others, but also influences me through their responses. This is sometimes painful, sometimes inconvenient, with 'a hundred indecisions, / And [...] a hundred visions and revisions', as the speaker in T. S. Eliot's 'The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock' so eloquently says (Eliot, 1936, p. 12).

An example. Between writing the different iterations of this paper, I travelled to L'viv in the historic region of Galicia, which is now divided between southeast Poland and west Ukraine. The westernmost city is Kraków and the easternmost, L'viv (or Ternopil, but L'viv was considered the capital of Galicia). At the time I had a Polish digraph ('cz') in my forename, and I was anxious about how the passport authorities in Rzeszów and then at the border would pronounce my name. Not being a Polish national, but with Polish-Ukrainian ancestry, I feared their implicit rejection. Nobody seemed to 'notice' my name on my outbound journey, but returning and crossing the border between Ukraine and Poland on foot near Przemśl, the border control officer looked closely at my passport and then looked me in the face, smiled, and called me by my name. A slight experience to an observer, perhaps, but important to me to be recognized by people now emerging in my lived world – the (East) Slavs I never heard about while I was growing up. I felt that in her small way, she was helping me to name myself and my world. Yet this experience was important in another, more expansive way, however.

At some point the quest for wholeness moves beyond the immediacies of my own psychic experiences. I seek to understand *life* rather than simply my own life. H.D. succeeded in transmuting her personal experience into something larger than herself, so that she could influence others. And as I engage in the process of naming myself and my world, I find that this has broader connotations because I am naming *the* world through my experience of a little portion of it. I was touched by the border officer on the Ukrainian border because she indirectly validated my efforts to conceive of and re-imagine lived worlds which transcend existing national and linguistic borders.

On the initial, personal dimension, I seek to name myself and my world in a way that reconciles the irreconcilable. For me to name my Slavic, paternal world is to bring to my birth mother's memory the pain of my unwanted conception. There are silences which I am afraid to break. But I must, in order to avoid a detrimental splitting. When I engage in the language arts, in the magic of 'spelling' my name, I find ways in which language can gesture at reconciliation and healing, in bridging those parts of myself which have been silenced by the pain of the past.

At the more macrocosmic level, my struggle is to grapple with the selective memories of existing nation states in which I trace myself. Betty Jean Lifton writes that the search adoptees undertake to name their lived worlds frequently makes them 'into constant searchers. Having made their personal journey through time, space, and emotion, they are

now ready to join others in the human condition on the Eternal Search to answer the great mysteries of life and death' (Lifton, 1994, p. 272). The conflict and selective memories of my birth parents and their families transmutes, in my case, into a reflection of historic tensions among Central and Eastern European 'ethnoscapes' (Vasylova, 2008; Todorova, 1997).

The place where I was conceived and born lies at the southern tip of the historic region of Bukovina (British spelling) – a region which was split between Ukraine and Romania in 1940. From the late eighteenth century until the mid-nineteenth century, Bukovina was administered as part of the Austrian outpost of Galicia, with L'viv (or Lemberg) as its headquarters. It became a separate Duchy in 1861 and remained part of Austria until 1918, with Czernowitz (Ukrainian: Chernivtsi) as its capital (Wolff, 2010; Magocsi, 2005). According to Sophie A. Welsch, Bukovina thrived under Habsburg administration, and in the nineteenth century it became a pluralistic society (Welsch, 2002). 'Bukovinism' was a byword for 'an exceptionally tolerant region with a strong tradition of peaceful cohabitation of its multiethnic and multicultural population' (Vasylova, 2008, p. 25). As Emanuel Turczynski has put it, in Bukovina, everyone was free 'to become holy in his own way' (quoted in Welsch, 2002, p. 94). There is a sense in which Bukovinians were able to engage in a selving process, which tolerated and sometimes adopted different religious and cultural practices and encouraged lexical borrowings (Rzetelska-Feleszko, 2006, p. 6).

As an extension of Galicia, Bukovina shared the multiethnic composition of this region. In talking about responses after the 1989 revolutions in the former Soviet Bloc, Luiza Bialasiewicz has written about the recent spatial reimagining of this part of Europe. Recalling Galicia in this period, to name territories 'Galician' 'immediately places them within a broader spatial framework and a wider set of geopolitical representations' than the logic of the nation state would afford (Bialasiewicz, 2005, pp. 163-4). Drawing on Roland Barthes's theory of myth-making, Bialasiewicz suggests that the Habsburgs may have tried to:

...reduce [their] many social, political, and cultural realities into a unity; the chaos of the world into an order; fragmented and accidental existence into essence; and historico-political contradictions into a harmonious whole capable of unifying if not resolving those contradictions. (Bialasiewicz, 2005, p. 164)

Clearly, this is a more positive, more inclusive way of coping with multiplicity than the way in which subsequent Ukrainian and Romanian governments have sought to educate their children (including my birth family) about these 'broader spatial frameworks' for demarcating human territory (Vasylova, 2008). Where Vasylova claims that Romanians in particular treat Bukovina as if it either never had a Ukrainian (Ruthenian) half or that the Soviets snatched a portion of Romania away in 1940, Bialasiewicz's conception of 'Galicia Felix' underscores the reality, highlighted by the saying: 'everyone was born with twelve tongues and twelve souls' (Bialasiewicz, 2005, p. 165). To name Galicia and Bukovina as valid, inclusive ethnoscapes means that:

Naming also acts to 'place' territories and their inhabitants within a set of broader representational containers – whether geopolitical, civilizational, historical, or cultural. Recalling the name Galicia not only evokes a series of nostalgic associations reminiscent of 'home' and 'tradition,' it also serves to *locate* that home and that tradition, both within the mytho-poetic space of the past and vis-à-vis the spatial and political containers of the

present. In the case of Galicia, the evocation of the historical region rests on denying legitimacy to present-day national-spatial divides. (Bialasiewicz, 2005, p. 175, original emphasis)

As an adoptee from this part of the world I enjoy a particular consciousness of the realities and possibilities that others (though by no means all) will necessarily lack because they are simply so immersed in the current establishment and /or did not question what they were taught in school. My situation is therefore not unique; it is the heritage of Bukovinians and Galicians and many other peoples with multiethnic pasts who find themselves in nation states which do not accurately reflect the multiple ethnoscapas intersecting within their current borders.

As I learn to name myself and my lived world, I am confronted with the worlds of others and the possibilities for re-naming those worlds in conversation together, in seeking a different way to name our lived worlds to that propounded by entities with questionable agendas. In this way, I let the pain of my own, private experience *become* me through healing and influencing others, tracing my personal story into a broader conglomerate of stories (Lifton, 1994, p. 263). I have gradually allowed the values I write about as an author-learner and (literary) theorist (truth, wholeness, human dignity, the uniqueness of the individual) to become living and transform myself in intimate and influencing ways.

Evaluating My Educational Influence on Author-Learners

But how do I measure my educational influence in specific ways? How do I conceive the influence I have with regard to my living-educational-theory? How do I improve what I am doing? In my case, as a theorist, I seem to be concerned with the experience of the author-as-learner in the context of HE English studies. This includes registered students at undergraduate and postgraduate level as well as lecturers and professors. My theoretical research involves offering a way for such individuals to conduct their research or inquiry in a way which is grounded in my core living values: principally, the quest to name ourselves and our lived world, and from this, to allow such naming to transform ourselves and others in a journey toward wisdom.

In talking about my own experience, I have shown how my own inquiry in the discipline has helped me to reconfigure how I relate to my subject material. I do not stand from it afar, but enter into troth with it and thus open myself to the possibility of transformation as a theorist, and more broadly, as an author-learner. For me in particular, I have learned to name myself and my world by engaging with a new literary humanism in the discipline. I am encouraged to name myself and my lived world, and in the process, to transform these so that they influence others. Specifically, I find resonance with those who are trying to conceive of ethnoscapas which go beyond existing national and linguistic boundaries. Instead of a postmodern drive to fragmentation and incessant multiplicity, I find that the core drive in myself, and, like Lifton, I believe is in others too, is toward nurturance and wholeness, even if I understand I may not fully attain it.

While I have taught at undergraduate level before, at the moment I envision my educational influence primarily within my activity as an author-learner, communicating my

living literary-educational theory in my writing and at conferences. Although I shall not expand on this, as a satellite I also engage in activities to bring students together to think about their own experiences as author-learners, and to encourage them to name their own worlds (Vytniorgu, 2016). I will now discuss two conceptions of the author-learner; or rather, two ontological frameworks for framing the responsibilities and agency of the individual called an author. Articulating the ontologies behind this role helps to specify the nature of the influence I hope to have, which will allow me to improve the quality of my theory because it is founded upon sound ontology. At this point I move away from the specifics of a 'theorist' identity, to embrace broader modes of authorship and the learning inhering in this role.

The first ontological framework derives from Michel Foucault's essay 'What Is an Author?' (1969). I choose this essay because of the enormous influence Foucault has had in literary studies, anticipating the poststructural movement which gained apace from the late-1970s (Baldick, 1996). In this essay Foucault overturns the historic Western notion of the author as an intentional individual writing a text which can be traced to his or her personal agency. For Foucault, a human subject cannot be 'pinned within language', rather, writing is 'a question of creating a space into which the writing subject constantly disappears' (Foucault, 1998, p. 206). Echoing a conventional idea in literary criticism, that the speaker in a poem, say, cannot be equated with the personhood of the human author, Foucault generalizes this sentiment to claim that 'It would be just as wrong to equate the author with the real writer as to equate him with the fictitious speaker' (Foucault, 1998, p. 215). Inhering in the author is, ironically, an *essential* 'plurality of the self' (Foucault, 1998, p. 215). There is no obvious 'individual' which the author of a text points to; indeed, the author 'can give rise simultaneously to several selves, to several subjects' (Foucault, 1998, p. 216). Authors do not 'precede' their works, instead they arise by virtue of those works and thus they are in some sense subjected to them and issue forth vulnerably from them (rather than the text issuing forth from the author) (Foucault, 1998, p. 221). In conclusion, we must 'deprive the subject of its role as originator' (ibid.).

I do not agree. Although Foucault's vision of the author resonates in some ways with the earlier description of H.D.'s naming activity, the difference between these two positions rests in the dialecticism inherent in H.D.'s behavior: there was a back-and-forth process characterized by an active agency on her, authorial part. For Foucault, however, at some point in his argument, a choice has to be made to subscribe to one or another presupposition: that either the self is essentially (in essence) stable and unified (or can become so); or the self is essentially multiple, split, and fraying (irrevocably so, it seems). Again, broadly speaking, the latter position seems to have attained to a fashionable assent in past decades in literary studies, perhaps because the split self can permit human beings to choose identities that diverge from established molds (which is healthy behavior). But from my vantage point, authors also have a responsibility to communicate, as best they can, from a coherent sense of self in command of the material being presented. As Jean McNiff has said of research stories in particular:

[They are] written by a researcher who brings his or her own values to the writing process. Consequently, the story can be understood as the articulation of the values of the writer, which communicates these values through its content and form. (McNiff, 2007, p. 319)

Foucault himself admitted that the activity of authorship extends beyond so-called literary works, even to theories (Foucault, 1998, p. 216). In my own educational and authorial context, therefore, I am writing largely for others who are positioned as author-learners: students and academics. The demands of being an author in higher education, even in literary studies, requires a more responsible and clarified notion of authorship than I think Foucault, in spite of his popularity, can offer.

Jean McNiff talks of the author writing from his core values, and his story gaining validity to the degree these values are living in his life and work (McNiff, 2007, pp. 319-20). Such values echo Jack Whitehead's vision of 'ontological and epistemological values that influence the life-affirming flow of humanity in all its forms' (McNiff, 2007, p. 313). But as I shall now try and explain, a more substantial framework needs to operate in order to counter those who, like Foucault, deny the possibility of a coherent, agential self in command of the values they purport to embrace. A different foundation for the essential humanity of the author-learner needs to circulate: one which extends the current notions of the human circulating the largely secular, post-deconstructionist new literary humanism.

In the theology of Eastern Orthodoxy I find a robust and humane articulation of the two drives I believe are at the back of these two conceptions of the human author. If I am to hope to influence others in the direction of my core living values (being able to name the self and the self's lived world in order to transform these) as an author, I need to be ready to give an explanation for why these values are valid and nurture my authorial activity. Of course, moving into theology to help in the articulation of my living ontological values exposes me to rejection on the basis that such opinions are purely subjective, 'unauthorized knowledge' (Apple, 1993). So be it. But operative philosophy, or a working ontology, can only *be* grounded in personal knowledge, something which Eastern Orthodoxy in particular has, for centuries, cherished (Louth, 2013).

In his *Introducing Eastern Orthodox Theology*, Andrew Louth explains that whereas a philosophy such as Platonism (and some forms of Christianity) distinguishes between the spiritual and the material, Orthodoxy traditionally distinguishes between the created and the non-created (Louth, 2013, p. 37). To echo St. Athanasios: humans are created 'out of nothing' (Louth, 2013, p. 39). It follows therefore, that humans can also return to nothing. The central dualism in Orthodoxy centers therefore on life and death, on being and non-being. As Louth says, 'No remedy for the human condition that falls short of death is of any use' (Louth, 2013, p. 54). Although human beings are created and are given life and in turn become life-giving, 'We are aware that in some way we belong to a world that has gone astray, to a society that is governed by values that are not true' (Louth, 2013, p. 66). For example, humans do not always build a home for themselves, but instead 'build defensive settlements, make weapons with which to defend ourselves and wreak destruction on one another'; we oppress; some even rape; and our values become colored by these 'false' behaviors (Louth, 2013, p. 67).

But whereas Western Christianity has traditionally emphasized sin as the result of 'the Fall', Eastern Christianity emphasizes death as that which must be overcome by life, preeminently in the risen Christ. Our human struggle is against that which would return us to nothingness (Louth, 2013, p. 71). In the Orthodox vision, the transition from paradise to brokenness is a movement from contemplating God and living 'in a world of reality and life',

into contemplating 'non-being', where humans 'enter a haunted world of unreality and death' (Louth, 2013, p. 72). According to Louth, it follows from this that what is commonly called 'the human condition' or 'being human', especially in forms of humanism, is an apt description of being human under the shadow of death and a drive to non-being (Louth, 2013, p. 87). And yet the hope in Orthodoxy rests on the connection between the traces of our true, vivacious human essence, created according to the image of God, with the mystery of the Incarnation, which somehow communicates to humanity what being human is truly about (Louth, 2013).

In drawing on Orthodox instincts, I am positing an ontological metanarrative that grounds the exercise of life-giving values, particularly as an author-learner seeking to influence others through my literary-educational theory. Choosing to live, to name myself and my world and to be transformed by this process means, for me, grounding my personal story and my research story within a more universal ontology that validates my quest for good, for being rather than non-being. Grounded in this story, values become virtues mediated through the Spirit of God: love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, balance (Gal. 5:22-23). And I move away from the concept of author and human propounded by Foucault and his intellectual descendants, with their celebration of disintegration and the disappearance of a centered human subject.

As I see it, the degree to which my authorial research story is valid rests on the degree to which my authorial values, which support my theoretical work, rest on coherent foundations. I need a more robust foundation than simply my assent to embodying 'ontological and epistemological values that influence the life-affirming flow of humanity in all its forms' (McNiff, 2007, p. 313). When I ground my living values in an ontology rooted in a theology of Christianity, which tells a story about other people's humanity as well as my own, I am refusing to 'play it safe', risking the censure of those who disdain 'unauthorized knowledge'.

In order to influence as an author-learner, I need to continue to write openly about the direction in which my research work moves: from the consciousness and nurture of life-affirming values, grounded in a humane metanarrative that can embrace my own, personal story; to the desire to influence others by entering publicly into troth with my subject material and also my readers. My educational influence stands or falls, therefore, on the degree to which I explain the validity for believing that life-affirming values, and specifically, embracing (if we can) the image of humanity revealed in the Incarnation and manifested in the fruits of the Spirit, is a truer way of life than embracing non-being, deconstruction, fragmentation, and (inter)personal distance.

Of course, a response to this assertion might be that one can be committed to promoting life-enhancing values without needing to embrace the Incarnation and with it, a Christian ontology. I agree that of course this is possible. But I am also asking the question: How can I improve what I am doing? As I see it, I can improve what I am doing by being a little more explicit about why I have chosen the core values I have, particularly the desire and right to name oneself and one's world and be transformed by this process. And I feel I can do this best by showing how my core value finds a rationale in a broader ontology supported, as I see it, by Orthodox instincts. In the writing of this paper, therefore, I believe I have contributed to my ongoing development, in much the same way Jane Tompkins

believed she was deepening the nature of her literary theory by writing such articles as 'Me and My Shadow' and 'The Way We Live Now' (1992).

Conclusion

To summarize, I have made the following claims:

1. That my theoretical research work concerns how learners in HE English studies can use meaningful experiences with literature as the basis for a quest for wisdom. Situating oneself as a learner in quest of wisdom permits one to evaluate the values encountered in literature as well as the values one brings to the reading experience. As part of a new literary humanism, my theoretical work returns questions of reading literature to the broader learning contexts in which this activity frequently occurs.
2. That my theoretical work implicates me as a theorist and involves me in the complex identity politics literary theory has witnessed over the years. I am tempted to equate my theoretical work with my self-worth, which in fact can encourage me to split my work from my personal life, and effectively hollow out the influence I could have in helping to revivify the 'human' in literary study. I am in danger of writing myself out of personal transformation through my research work.
3. That in spite of this risk, I am finding a way to adopt an epistemology which encourages me to engage closely with my subject material: to listen to it in humility and open myself to the potential of being transformed.
4. That for me, in my current circumstances, one of the principal ways of being transformed is to be able to name myself and my world and then transform these. This becomes my core living value – that which drives my literary-educational theory at the moment. In particular, I find ways to name the pain in my personal narrative, to bridge silences and give voice to parts of myself that have previously been split. Broadening this process, I join with those who are trying to envision possibilities for imagining ethnoscapas that transcend existing boundaries drawn by political nation states. By living my core values out in public, I hope to influence others and be influenced by them in turn.
5. That my principal means at the moment of influencing others educationally is as an author-learner writing for other author-learners. I can either conceive the author as a fragmented subject *only* brought into being by what is authored; or, in spite of my wounds, I can conceive myself as fundamentally stable, with a core essence which not only validates my authorship but which also constitutes my humanity. By being explicit about this in a paper such as this, I hope to improve the ground of my authorial identity.
6. That an Eastern vision of Christianity is, for me at the moment, a metanarrative into which I can write my own, personal research story and my drive to name myself and my lived world and be transformed by this process. Eastern Orthodoxy postulates the central drama in human life as the struggle for life in God and with each other to triumph non-being. By framing the naming of myself

and my lived world within this broader human drama, I find a way to validate my core values and center myself (and others) as both an author-learner and a human being. My new literary humanism is thus saved from the burden and fragility of having to rely on the hall of mirrors (which can only reflect humans among humans) to defend the uniqueness of myself and others in my discipline.

Inevitably, this research report can only be provisional. It comes from where I am in my life right now and is grounded in those visions which I find particularly resonating. Nevertheless, I hold to Stanley Kunitz's words, and give what I have to give. I dare. 'I do what I can' (Lifton, 1994, p. 271).

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